

Eurotrip (Not Like the Movie)

by LJ9

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Summary: Modern AU, sequel to "I'd Build You a World": Merida and Hiccup backpack through Europe.

1. Chapter 1

****Disclaimer:**** I don't own anyone you recognize, who belong to Disney and/or Pixar, Dreamworks, and Cressida Cowell.

Thank you to everyone who reviewed, followed, and/or favorited "I'd Build You a World." I'm really glad you guys liked it!

I wasn't planning on writing a sequel, but LunaSolas had an idea specific enough that I could work with, so I did. This isn't that great, though, so I hope you're not too excited.

The ****most important note**** is that I intend no disrespect toward any country or nationality described in this story.

If you need me, I'll be weeping over the fact that I'm not in Europe.

* * *

><p>You learn a lot about a person by traveling with them. His bag is full of sketchbooks, art supplies, camera, guidebooks, and a list of noteworthy cathedrals: St Denis, Notre Dame, Reims, Chartres, Westminster, Koln, the Duomo, St Vitus. Hers holds the bare necessities, some clothes and the phrasebook her mum bought her; she figures if she needs anything she can buy it, and there's no sense in getting bogged down with stuff. Hiccup already knows that Merida can be perfectly content lying in bed with him half the morning, but when it comes to a vacation where there are things to see and do she's up early, ready to pack the days full. Merida realizes just how easy it is for Hiccup to fade into a crowd, even though he's not exactly short; she turns her back more than once to discover he's disappeared

into a horde of tourists, only to retrace her steps and find him right where she left him. She can drink more beer than he can, but wine makes her giggly and affectionate; he can't pass by an art supply store without at least stopping to fog up the window with his breath as he ogles the goods. She catches him ogling a girl in Madrid and starts to berate him before he turns the same appreciative look on a monument to Columbus.<p>

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><p>Paris is hot and crowded with tourists. Despite their best efforts to get there early they still have to wait in line outside the Louvre and they do so grumpily, both privately doubting that this will be worth it but neither wanting to say it aloud. Merida nudges her way through the crowd in front of the Mona Lisa; it's hard to appreciate the most famous painting in history when you're surrounded by people all jostling to see it, like it's the only work of art in the whole building. Art museums aren't really her thing, she remembers belatedly.<p>

At a cafÃ© she orders them drinks in rusty French and he smiles for the first time that day. "What?" She knows her accent isn't good, but the waiter understood it well enough.

"I didn't know you speak French."

She shrugs. "I didn't care which foreign language I studied and Mum suggested it. And it's good for international politics."

"I like it," he admits, voice low, and she blushes. He finds the weirdest things about her attractive, the freak.

"It sounds ridiculous, a Scot speaking French."

"No, it doesn't. Go on, say something else."

The dreaded "say something else" effectively clears her mind of any actual phrases she knows. So she waggles her eyebrows and starts, "_Voulez-vous coucher_â€" and he rolls his eyes.

There is actually precious little of that going on on this trip. Sleeping in a hostel dorm with six or 14 other people doesn't lend itself to intimacy. He's heard people going at it in the showers, but that's gross, and a recipe for disaster to boot (no pun intended). Maybe one day they can splurge on a private room and literally just sleep together. He's missed having her arms around him all night.

After their less than spectacular visit to the Louvre, they revise their ideas of what it's really _necessary_ to see. They're traveling in tourist season in some of Europe's most popular destinations and it's becoming clear that maybe their big plans were a little too big, at least to fit into this one trip. They have plenty of time for other trips later, she remarks casually, though the idea of planning a future with him is both thrilling and terrifying. She shoves the thought away and listens as he mutters over his list.

They compromise: okay, they can skip Avignon, but he's dead set on going to Sevilleâ€"it's the biggest cathedral in the world. Okay, they can't possibly go into _every_ history museum and bar they see,

but if there's an opportunity to tour a brewery or distillery, she's taking it.

Without discussing it they agree that it's absolutely imperative they go to the top of the Eiffel Tower. Late in the afternoon they brave the queue, ride the elevators, and eventually stand close to the lattice of wire and stare out at the city, a faint haze smudging the far edges of the city into the horizon. A breeze ruffles through Hiccup's hair and she smiles at him, looking so handsome and noble as he gazes over Paris. Then he sneezes, and though it ruins the clich  romantic illusion, she prefers him with a familiar scrunched-up face. That's who she wants to kiss, believe it or not.

"Are you ready?"

He nods seriously. "Let's do this."

"You are such a dork," she mutters.

"You started it." He's grinning as their lips meet. Normally he's not the biggest fan of PDA, but they're at the top of the Eiffel Tower, and if you're not allowed to kiss your dream girl there then where are you allowed to?

His hand feels heavy on the small of her back and she presses closer, winding a finger through a belt loop and brushing her thumb against the skin of his side, making him sigh into her mouth. It's too much, even for Paris, so he pushes back, bumping into someone behind him and apologizing off-handedly. She looks pleased with herself; she knows how to push all of his buttons, how to provoke a whole spectrum of emotions and reactions in him. Not that he can't get her to react, too, but he tries not to get her too riled up, in any way, in public. Sometimes he almost wishes she would do the same. "Merida," he scolds lightly.

He can't be that annoyed. It was on the list, and it's Paris, for heaven's sake; there are people snogging everywhere. She smirks and then lifts her chin and says haughtily, "_Je ne regrette rien_."

* * *

><p>She wouldn't even have known to look for them before, but now, as they stand in front of Notre Dame, she's not seeing them. "Alright, smart guy, where are the flying buttresses?"<p>

He can't answer because he's too busy staring at the iconic pair of towers, the great arches over the doors with their tympanums filled with carved figures there's so much that he doesn't know where to look first, his eyes darting over the facade. Every stone they see was shaped by hand; workers used human-powered cranes to lift tons of blocks hundreds of feet into the air. People died for this building. Generations worked on it, children and grandchildren continuing the work of those who started its construction. He's more awestruck than he'd expected to be.

Since it doesn't look like they'll be moving anytime soon, she tries to see it through his eyes. Now she can notice the details, like the crowds of saints, and the way the points of the arches direct the eye up and up, past the windows and towers to the summer sky above. It

makes St Giles' back in Edinburgh seem small and dark in comparison.

They walk around to the back of the cathedral where stained glass windows are supported by a framework of stone and tiers of flying buttresses. This part of the building is more glass than wall, and she remembers his description of why it was possible, the buttresses spreading the weight. She wonders, abruptly, if she's a buttress or a window, and nearly asks Hiccup. She's not sure she'd like the answer, if he even answered truthfully. And besides, he's so wrapped up in the Gothic wonder in front of them that she doesn't want to take his attention away from it.

The interior is light, the ceiling impossibly high above them. She feels a sort of burden knowing how old it is, how it all works, but it's lasted this long and she has no reason to believe the place will fall down on them now. And even if it did, Hiccup would probably be okay with it. She takes his arm to steer him gently around tourists posing for pictures, leaving him free to gawk upward. He trails his fingers reverently around the curve of pillars, sad that he'll never design something so amazing but endlessly grateful that someone else did.

* * *

><p>Somehow the bus that's supposed to arrive at five in the morning rolls into Seville an hour early. They shuffle off and into the station; Hiccup looks concussed, practically drooling, eyes barely open. She guides him into a hard seat and he drops down heavily, bag on the floor between his feet. He folds himself over and leans on the top of the bag, falling into real sleep almost instantly. Merida rolls her neck as she settles into the chair next to him. No one will even be awake at the hostel for hours yet; the caf  s are still shut up and the city buses aren't running. She holds her pack across her lap and wonders whose idea of a good time this was, all of this tramping around Europe, sleeping on buses and trains and in hostels with too many other people who don't have the common decency not to run in and out of rooms all night. Hiccup snorts in his sleep next to her; if it weren't so early and she wasn't mad at him for something  "she's not sure the bus being early wasn't somehow his fault  "she'd think the snort cute, and she'd think that there was no one else she'd rather have sitting next to her right now. But it is too early for that, and though she knows one of them should stay awake to make sure no one nicks their things, she puts her head on her pack and sleeps.<p>

Later on they drink thick hot chocolate in the morning and sweet heady wine at night. They walk through a park with yellow dirt to a plaza decorated in gleaming glazed tiles; they feel sluggish in the heat, the tang of cheaply-tanned leather sharp in their nostrils. Among the whitewashed streets they catch glimpses of whole walls colored fuchsia by bougainvillea vines; orange trees line every avenue and fill courtyards. A group of them from the hostel goes to a restaurant where they eat gazpacho and tortillas de patatas, onion and potato in a thick cake-like omelette. While they sip sangria a man plays the guitar, fingers impossibly fast, and women dance in ruffled dresses and proud expressions. Hiccup treats her to a carriage ride, pulled by a beautiful grey mare, but it's hard to appreciate the city when it feels like she's melting. As they wait to board their discount-airline flight she hopes Italy will be

cooler.

* * *

><p>By the time they get there, it's official: there are Australians everywhere. Every hostel they stay in has at least one cheerful Aussie voice bouncing through the halls. There are also New Zealanders, Canadians and Americans, South Africans, to say nothing of the Brits and other Europeans from all parts of the continent, along with a few stalwart Brazilians and Japanese. He's never heard so many different languages going on, and idly tries to identify them in the kitchens and lounges of their hostels. Most of their fellow travelers are outgoing and lively; every evening bands of them noisily prepare to venture out to restaurants and bars and clubs. Sometimes he and Merida are invited along, and he leaves the bar decisions up to her. From their nights out she accumulates a wad of coasters and bar napkins scrawled with names of drinks and recipes. As they sit on buses or trains she squints at her handwriting, never exactly tidy at the best of times, and records them in a notebook he's let her claim.<p>

* * *

><p>They break up in Rome. He calls it a break up; she just calls it a break. No matter what they call it, it happens, and it hurts.<p>

Italian men aren't shy about complimenting pretty girls, even complete strangers, and Merida would be lying if she said she didn't like it a little. Hiccup doesn't say anything about it; he just draws in on himself, becoming invisible right next to her. It's not hard when her hair is so eye-catching. It doesn't even cross his mind to put his arm around her, try to make it obvious that they're together, because he's not some possessive d-bag and she has just as much power to show she's taken as he does. That's what really bothers him, if he's honest, that she doesn't make the effort to explain the situation. She just smiles and laughs and accepts the free drinks.

She's not trying to get people to buy her drinks; she doesn't even realize how much it's happening until she overhears a Canadian guy from their hostel remark on it. She's not flirtingâ€"she's certain she's not flirting, or at least not doing anything that would be considered flirting at the Falconerâ€"and truth be told, she's kind of used to not having to pay for drinks, since she works in a pub and she's the daughter of a chieftain. It's just the way things have always been. And if Hiccup doesn't get that, it's his problem, not hers.

"What?" she demands after she sees him shake his head again. They're in a crowded bar and she's got a free, albeit tiny, glass of limoncello in front of her, courtesy of the guy behind the bar.

His expression is flat. "Why do you let all these guys hit on you?"

"They're not. They're just being friendly." They are hitting on her, some of them at least, and she knows it, and preens inwardly. Who doesn't like to have people, strangers who aren't obligated to do so, compliment them? She won't admit it, though, because however much

she likes hearing "_bella_" aimed at her, it also feels wrong somehow.

He runs a hand through his hair in frustration. "I don'tâ€¦ I can't tell you what to do."

"No, you can't," she snaps.

"But if you're going to be like this then I'm not going to stick around." He knows that she loves him, but if that's true, the niggling voice in his head asks, why is she acting like this? Doesn't she know he thinks she's beautiful? Does she even want to be with him, now that there are so many other options? Why would she want him instead of one of the handsome dark-haired men who smile at her? It's completely stupid and wrong, he knows deep down, but that doesn't stop the twist of doubt in his stomach.

Her nostrils flare. "Fine. Don't. Or maybe I won't." Their next pre-booked ticket is from Milan to Munich in five days. "I'll see you on the train." She stomps out. The next morning she's gone, on a train heading anywhere away from him.

* * *

><p>In the hostel's lounge he stares at the map without seeing it. The plan had been to go by train from Rome to Florence to Pisa to Milan, and from there on to Germany. He's not going to call her; she needs time to cool off, and she can take care of herself. If she's not in Milan, then he'll call. He hopes her rage doesn't send her home, though given the way she sometimes makes impulsive decisions he wouldn't be terribly surprised if it did.<p>

As he tries to contemplate what he should do next, a blonde flops onto one of the chairs near him. "Hi, I'm Daisy." She's a little too loud but in a jolly way, so it's hard to be bothered by the volume.

He's not in the mood to talk, but he doesn't want to be rude. "Hi. Hiccup."

She doesn't ask. "Where're you from?"

"Berk, in the North Sea."

"Never heard of it," she says brightly.

He shrugs. "No big loss. Let me guess, you're fromâ€¦New Zealand." The All Blacks lanyard around her neck makes it obvious, but she lights up anyway.

"You're right! Most people guess Australian." He hides a smile at her expression of distaste and resignation. "You're smart, though." Again he shrugs, and Daisy eyes the way his shoulders move under his shirt. She asks how long he's been there and where else he's going to go; she's younger, just beginning a gap year with her friendsâ€¦they're planning to find jobs here for a while to earn some money before moving on. She wants to go to India and Thailand, maybe Cambodia.

As she talks Hiccup watches her as much as listens to her. She's got a wide, tanned face that suggests a lot of time outdoors, dark brown

eyes and hair in a messy bun; she smiles easily, readily, and despite his bad mood he finds himself smiling back, because she's just so young and energetic and nice, like a puppy. When her friends come in and call boisterously for her she stands.

"We're going out to the bars tonight, d'you want to come along?" she asks casually.

"Maybe. I have to ask myâ€" he says before remembering that she's not there to ask, if she still is his anything. "Sure," he amends, wincing inwardly. It'll be better than sitting around here or wandering the streets of Rome alone. Right?

"Great! See you later." Daisy bounces away and he spends the rest of the evening failing to convince himself that accepting wasn't a terrible idea.

He's about to head back to his room when she comes into the lounge. "Ready?" Daisy asks. Her hair's down and she has on some faintly glittery top that makes him start to beg off, pleading indigestion. But he's not in Berk, where he can wallow in his room, curled up with Toothless; he's in Rome, on a trip that cost a small fortune, and if he's not going out and seeing new things then he might as well go home now. Man up, Haddock, he tells himself, sounding disturbingly like Snotlout, but he nods at her anyway.

The group is mostly Kiwis, with a couple of Americans and three guys who turn out to be Swedish. Everybody is perfectly nice as they crowd around small tables. He doesn't want a drink, but it's easier to just get a Peroni than to explain that he doesn't like beer. Daisy and her friends get Campari and soda and they clink their glasses together, cheering "Salute!"

"Where are you from?" one of the Swedes asks.

"Berk," he says, and then one of them asks something, presumably in Swedish, that invokes his dad's name. He can't escape, even all the way down here, he thinks, taking a swallow of beer. The discussion about football clubs turns into a debate about football vs. rugby thanks to one of Daisy's friends. They go to another bar, just as loud and overpriced as the first, where he opts for a bottle of water; then they take the metro to see the Coliseum all lit up.

As he stares at the millennia-old marvel Daisy wanders into him and giggles "Oops," her eyes a little glassy as she smiles at him. "Here, take a picture with me!"

Before he can react her arms are tight around his waist and her cheek is close to his. He puts one arm around her shoulder slowly and her friend with the iPhone orders, "Say formaggio!" Daisy giggles and stutters over the word while Hiccup just smiles faintly. She squeezes him before she lets go to check the photo; it meets with her approval, judging by her squeal.

"Give me your number and I'll send it to you." Their faces on the screen are too bright, the monument behind them all but eclipsed by their heads, his smile not meeting his eyes; hopefully she'll still like it in the morning without the haze of alcohol fogging her vision.

He's depressingly clear-headed as they approach the hostel. Daisy pulls him to a stop outside the door. "That was heaps of fun. I'm glad you came out with us," she says, hand still on his arm.

"Yeah. Thanks for inviting me."

The light overhead casts strange, mask-like shadows on her face, but he can still read her intentions through them with sudden dread. He was an idiot to agree to come. When she presses forward he's quick enough to turn his head so her lips end up on his cheek. "Sorry," he says to her questioning look. "I just... You're kinda drunk, and I might still have a girlfriend?" Her confusion is understandable as he rambles on. "We got in an argument and she left but I'm pretty sure we'll make up eventually, because I really do...love...her..."

Daisy looks so young as she stares at him; he's only three years her senior but right now he feels simultaneously much older and much less mature. He waits wide-eyed for her to say something or slap him or anything, and he's unprepared to see a tear track through her makeup before she hurries into the hostel, leaving him feeling more terrible than he did before.

* * *

><p>After a few days the anger has burned out and guilt set in in its place. She ends up in Pisa and she watches tourists prop up the bell tower, trying to ignore the lunge in her chest at the missed opportunity to kiss him there like they'd planned.<p>

Outside a caf   by the river, she breaks down and calls the second person who comes to mind.

"Princess. I thought you were on the grand tour. To what do I owe the honor?"

"Just wanted to hear a familiar voice."

"Aren't you with Hiccup?" She pauses just long enough for him to assume the worst. "What've you done?" he accuses.

This feeling of annoyance is familiar. She latches onto it. "Why do you assume I did something?"

"Because I've known you my whole life and I can count the number of times it _wasn't_ you doing something to cause trouble on one hand." Good old Jamie.

"Fine," she groans. "It was me. I lost my temper."

"Well I am just shocked to hear that."

"Shut up."

"Merida, just apologize, alright?" She sighs heavily, already knowing that's what she should do and not wanting to do it. "Alright?" he repeats slightly louder.

"Alright."

"Good. Now don't call me again unless you're bleeding or something's

on fire."

When he's hung up she presses the heels of her hands against her eyes, trying to ignore the sunlight, the noise of tourists and natives alike, and most of all the leaden mass of guilt and loneliness low in her gut.

* * *

><p>Notes:

Voulez-vous coucher avec moi ce soir = "Do you (formal or plural) want to go to bed with me this evening." You know, it's from "Lady Marmalade." Which is now going through my head.

>Je ne regrette rien = "I regret nothing." Also a famous song by Edith Piaf.

>It hurts my soul to have used the anglicized "Seville," but I had to make it in character.
gazpacho = thick tomato soup served chilled, a specialty in southern Spain.

>tortillas de patatas = as described; not like the Mexican flat bread.

>St Giles' is the high kirk (most important church) of the Church of Scotland. Technically not a cathedral because a cathedral is the seat of a bishop and the Church of Scotland doesn't have bishops.
The All Blacks are New Zealand's rugby team, basically (from my limited knowledge of rugby) the best team in the world.

>formaggio = cheese in Italian.

>The Leaning Tower of Pisa is the cathedral's bell tower.<p>

2. Chapter 2

I forgot to say in the first chapter that this fic is dedicated to the kind family who gave me a ride from the train station in Bangor to the hostel in Caernarfon when I visited Wales. I didn't get their names or address, so I wasn't able to thank them properly at the time, but now I try to tell people how nice they were to make up for it.

Thank y'all for the reviews, follows, and favorites! Without further ado, the final chapter.

* * *

><p>He goes to Florence as planned. Without her it's quiet, and he sketches a lot. Italy seems nonchalant about its churches, many of which are filled with medieval frescoes or leftover bits of saints or Hiccup's weight in gold; he sits in the relatively cool interiors and admires the sheer fact that these things have survived the centuries. He also finds his way, almost by accident, to cemeteries, where he wanders through the tombstones wondering about people's lives, how they got from England, America, Russia to die in Rome or Florence and be buried there among other foreigners.<p>

By the time they meet up again, on the platform at the train station in Milan, she looks harried and tired. "I want to get out of this country," she says, not meeting his eyes. The calls of "_Ciao, bella_" have lost their charm; free drinks make her feel guilty now, and she can no longer try to smother her sorrows in chocolate gelato.

She's missed him, has had so many questions gone unanswered without him there. Her expression is miserable, her eyes dull, as she looks up at him. Before he has the chance to respond she says, "'m sorry. It was nice having so many people compliment me. I wasn't trying to encourage them, though."

He doesn't want to have it out right there, with happier people passing them to board the train, but he can't stop himself from answering. "It didn't seem like you were trying to discourage them, either. You do know I think you're beautiful, right?"

Her heart sinks even lower at the hurt on his face, the doubt she's made him feel. "I know."

"Is it me, then? Do you not want to...be with me anymore? I know I'm not like these guysâ€œ"

"I do want to be with you. You're the only one I want to be with. I just let it go to my head, and...I'm scared."

"Of what?" Merida doesn't scare easily, so his pulse picks up as terrible thoughts race through his mind.

"I've never been part of something like this, with you. I'm scared of losing myself. I'm scared of losing you."

She's known him for about a year and the list of the most important things in her life now goes her family, Scotland, and then him. She didn't grow up dreaming of a prince coming to sweep her off her feet (probably because she's met a few princes and they're thoroughly unimpressive); she's never thought of herself as someone who needed saving. Sometimes fierce Amazon Merida pops up inside her, feeling betrayed and reminding her none too gently that she doesn't need a man to be complete and that she can't let him hold her back from accomplishing all of her goals. It makes her feel weak for loving him, for wanting to be around him. Then she thinks of the strongest woman she knows, a woman who is brilliant and murderously efficient, who helps maintain an estate profitably and who is terribly in love with her husband despite the children he's saddled her with. Her mum isn't perfect, but the older she gets the more Merida appreciates all that Elinor's done over the years. And she realizes more every day that all of it, marriage and children and life in the castle they call home, was her mother's choice, and still is.

He laughs humorlessly. "Trust me, Merida, I don't want you to change. Especially not to be more like me. One Hiccup in this world is more than enough."

They shouldn't have expected this being together 24/7 thing to work. Being independent is like a religious obligation to Merida, and he's not exactly used to having somebody with him all the time, either. Their arrangement in Scotland works well, because while they see each other almost every weekend, for the rest of the week they do their own things in their respective cities. It was probably a little ambitious and optimistic of them to think they could spend three weeks together under less than ideal conditions without getting on each other's nerves.

"I'm sorry I was jealous."

"I'm sorry that I kind of liked that you were jealous. And that I didn't turn down the drinks."

He shrugs, pack heavy on his shoulders. "Free drinks, though. And you didn't even have to hustle anyone at darts for them."

Before she can say anything else the conductors are waving people onboard. They find their places and sit side by side, trying not to touch too much, neither of them sure it's okay. It feels like the first time they met. It has to: no time since then has been this awkward. He wants things to go back to how they were before, but he's not sure if he's supposed to want that, or if it's what she wants. Though she may be "alright, she is impulsive and quick-tempered and stubborn as a whole pack of mules, she's not cruel. She doesn't like admitting she's wrong, but she wasn't trying to hurt him. He knows her, good and bad, and even on the days he least wants to, he still loves her.

He loves her, and Toothless does, his dad does, hell, even Gobber does. He chuckles remembering Gobber's extravagant bow to her when the two met at winter break. To her questioning look he explains, "I was just thinking that Gobber would never forgive me if we broke up permanently. Or maybe he'd thank me and try to woo you himself." It isn't true, but it startles a brief smile out of her.

"You didn't tell them?" she asks, so quietly that he can barely hear her over the noise of the tracks.

He shakes his head. "I was waiting. Until I knew for sure thatâ€¦" He shakes his head again, bleakly. It would have been bad enough if they'd broken up for good, but then he'd have to go pick up Toothless from where he was vacationing at DunBroch, and that would have been excruciatingly uncomfortable. "You?"

"No. But I called Jamie," she mumbles, looking down at her lap. "He was not at all surprised to hear that it was my fault, and told me to apologize." Merida's said it before but she needs to say it again until he believes her. "I know I messed up, Hiccup, butâ€¦"

His hand closes on her wrist, not her hand or her knee but her wrist, and she sobs suddenly. On a train in Italy and crying like a bairn because she just knows she's lost him. She'd be mortified if she wasn't so heartbroken.

"Merida," he soothes, putting his arm around her shoulders and pulling her head down to his shoulder. His other arm goes around her too and she clings to it as he strokes her hair.

When she's calm again he asks, "So should I call Gobber and tell him you're free?" She lets out a strangled laugh, and he continues, "I think he's got a kilt somewhere. That'll show off his legs the way you Scots like. Do you just have a thing for amputees? That's kind of messed up, Merida." She can feel him shaking his head as she giggles damply.

She twists her head to look at him. "I adore you."

He gives her the half smile that first caught her attention. It's no less potent now, even as he shrugs. "I kind of think you're the love

of my life, so I guess we should just stay together."

* * *

><p>Something is up. She's watching out the train windows with way too much focus to just be admiring the scenery. As the train rolls into a station in some Swiss village she grabs their bags and leaps out the door, leaving him to scramble up his things and follow her, shouting.<p>

"What the hell, Merida?"

"Come on, Haddock, where's your sense of adventure?" He glares at her as she grins, pleased with the success of her gambit, and shoulders her pack.

This is more like it. The sky is milky blue and mountains bite into it in the distance. She'll have to bring the boys back here on a hiking holiday. And the meadow rolling ahead of them—"Angus would love that. She climbs over a short fence and strikes out.

Behind her Hiccup is already rehearsing what to say to the police when they're nabbed for trespassing. They're probably far enough east to be in the German-speaking part of the country, which means he'll have to explain; if they're still in the Italian-speaking part they'll be out of luck. _Sorry, officer, my girlfriend is insane_. He can't remember the word for insane so he starts to come up with other less-than-complimentary phrases to describe her, like stubborn and difficult and unconcerned with rules that are clearly meant for other people and not her.

"What are you grumbling about back there?"

"You, you...scofflaw. You do know that even the president has to follow the rules, right?"

"I'm not president yet," she says cheerfully. They're off the train and out of the city and she feels re-energized already. In a bit Hiccup will get what a brilliant idea this was and then everything will be perfect. She takes a deep breath and drops her pack to the ground and then herself after it.

"I'm pretty sure this field belongs to somebody," Hiccup says, looming over her.

"Sit down. You're blocking my sun."

He sighs and sits. It _is_ really pretty, with tiny flowers in the grass around them and the far-off clunk of cow bells. Merida lies back, looking relaxed, pale legs stretched out and toes pointed. Even though she lives in the city and loves it there, she's still a wild Highland girl at heart; it gets hard for her if she feels stuck, confined in urban sprawl. He's forgotten that, and knows that she needs this, just like she needed to jump off the train like a maniac without warning him. Now she's smiling slightly, one arm thrown over her forehead, her hair curling into the pale wildflower-dotted grass, and she looks like Alphonse Mucha painted her. He forgets that he's trying to be annoyed because he's so taken aback by her beauty.

She must feel his eyes on her because she asks "What?" squinting up

at him.

He tears his eyes away from her and looks off into the distance, at the fewest people he's seen in weeks. "This is the first time we've been alone since we left Scotland."

"Huh. You're right."

"It'd be a shame to waste all this privacy..." he muses.

Almost before he's done talking she yanks him down by the collar and he kisses her sun-warmed lips. They make out until they're interrupted by a curious cow.

* * *

><p>"I don't know if this is such a good idea," he says doubtfully.<p>

"It'll be fine," she assures him, confident as always.

If they're going to hitchhike anywhere, Switzerland's probably the best place to do it. As far as he knows, nobody's ever made a movie about tourists getting kidnapped and tortured in Switzerland. A van pulls over and Merida waves excitedly, leaning on the passenger's side door and chattering into the open window. The driver doesn't speak French but his wife does; Hiccup stands back and tries to look respectable and nonthreatening. That's easy enough. After a brief discussion between Merida and the woman and then the woman and her husband, Merida turns back to wave Hiccup over, and they climb into the backseat.

"_Vous Ãªtes d'oÃ¹?_" the woman asks when they're moving again.

"_Je suis Ã©cossaise_" Merida says proudly, "_et Hiccup est de l'Ã©le de Berk_."

"_Un vrai Viking_, _hein?_" The woman laughs, but kindly. Her name is Johanna and her husband is Matthias; he doesn't say anything as he drives, presumably because he doesn't speak French, but Merida and Johanna make up for the men's silence by chatting amiably.

As they approach a small town, Johanna faces her husband and speaks rapidly. It's German, but it's not a speed Hiccup can keep up with. Matthias' eyes flicker to the pair of foreigners in his backseat, and Hiccup gives a little shrug. After a moment Johanna turns back and speaks to them in French.

"_Vraiment?_" Merida asks, surprised. "_Vous Ãªtes sÃªr?_"

"_Oui, c'est pas de problem_."

Merida smiles at him eagerly. "They're offering to let us stay with them for a day or two."

They seem like nice enough people. More importantly, he can tell how much Merida wants to do it. They have plans, yeah; there are beds waiting for them in Munich tonight, but there's no point in being on vacation if you can't change your plans, so he nods and says okay. "_Merci_" he adds, and Johanna smiles, looking as pleased as

Merida.

As they drive up to the house a dog barks, wagging its tail. Bright red geraniums in window boxes stand out against the dark wood of the house; around one side a goat stands in a pen, chewing implacably. Matthias carries their bags inside and Johanna shows them around the house, which smells fresh and clean and faintly of spices. It's tidy in a way that Merida's home never has been, despite her mum's best efforts, and never will be.

Johanna pushes open a door to an upstairs room, the one where they'll be sleeping, explaining that it's her sons' room but they're away at Scout camp. Merida bites her lip to hold in a laugh when she sees the beds they'll use. "Dibs on the bottom bunk," Hiccup says dryly, peering over her shoulder.

At dinner he thanks them in German for their hospitality. At that it becomes clear that Matthias is not as taciturn as they'd believed; in his own language he's animated and funny, at least judging by Hiccup's laughter. She's glad Hiccup's talking now. Not knowing what's going on bothers him more than it bothers her. They enjoy the home-cooked meal and the wine and the company, even with the occasional translation difficulty.

"This is nice," she murmurs from the top bunk. It's dark and quiet; a breeze blows in the open window, smelling like wild grass and cold water. Below her Hiccup shifts with a rustle of the duvet, and even though she'd rather be in bed with him she's not about to complain. Out loud, at least.

"Not that I condone your methods, but I'm glad you jumped off the train."

"It worked out better than I expected," she admits. She pauses, listening to his breathing, and then says, "Thank you, Hiccup."

"For what?"

There are too many answers to that. For forgiving her, for loving her, for following her off the train (though he didn't have much choice there, since she'd taken his bag); for being the person she wanted to call after a bad day and the person she wanted with her on a good day; for not being afraid to stand up for himself even when it meant standing against her. Too many things that would sound silly or foolishly romantic. She wants to thank him for everything he is, but the right words elude her.

She's silent so long that he thinks she's fallen asleep. Then she says, softly but firmly, "For wanting to know where the stairs went."

He smiles at the mattress above him. "My pleasure. Thank you for the snakebite."

"Anytime," she whispers back.

When he's awake enough to realize what's going on, with pale dawn light blossoming behind the lace curtains, he's not surprised that there's a ginger curl tickling his nose and a warm body draped over half of him, legs twined with his and a hand on his chest, right over

his heart. He scoots closer to the wall and wraps an arm around her, pulling her near and falling asleep again.

* * *

><p>There's an...incident in Berlin. Well, 'incident' probably isn't the best word. 'Situation'? 'Complication'? A hiccup, he thinks, and shakes his head at himself. After a while they'll probably be able to look back on it and laugh. Judging by Merida's face as they sit on a train barreling south, that time is definitely somewhere in the future.

* * *

><p>Pickpocketing, like so many other inconveniences, is something that happens to other people. Merida is greatly surprised when she reaches into her bag for her wallet at the end of Charles Bridge and can't find it.<p>

Her cursing is a good gauge for how upset she is; she's skipped over the mutters of "Shite" and the odd portmanteau curses directly to the unintelligible stream-of-consciousness profanity. Anyone else from Edinburgh would recognize the things she's saying, though he's got little idea. Luckily that means no one else around them is likely to be offended, at least not by her words; her tone of voice and her glower convey her point handily.

"I can't believe it," she mutters, still pawing through her bag.

"It's gone?"

"Of course it's gone," she snaps. "All my money, my credit card, my student ID&e" A family photo, a doodle he'd given her. She whips her head around at the people passing by as if she'd be able to magically find whoever took her wallet. Someone's due a kicking.

"But you've still got your passport, right? And your phone?"

"Yeah."

"So it's fine." He's calm, though she knows he'd be freaking right out if their places were reversed. "Call your parents and tell them to cancel your card. I should have enough money to get us through the rest of the trip."

It's not his fault but she glares at him anyway. "Can you stop being so damned sensible and let me be really bloody angry for a bit?"

"Be my guest."

She doesn't want to admit it but he's right: it's not the disaster it could have been. They're nearly at the end of the trip, and she hadn't had all that much cash on her; but her ID picture was really great and it's just an insult, an affront that someone has dared to steal from her. She fumes silently, wishing that there was some way to track down the asshole who'd lifted her wallet, or that she could go back in time and put the wallet somewhere more secure. Hiccup waits a short distance away as she clenches her fists, feeling angry

and stupid and helpless and like she really, really doesn't want to do what she has to do next. Finally she can't put it off any longer and rings home.

When her mother answers she winces a little. She'd been hoping to catch her dad instead. "Hi, Mum," she says, trying to keep her tone light, but not too cheery.

"Merida! Where are you?"

"Prague. It's really lovely." And it is, she sees, looking at the Vltava sparkling beneath the bridge, the castle up on the hill, the sky cheerfully bright.

"How are you?" Mum asks warmly. "And Hiccup?"

"We're alright. Look, Mum, no big deal, but could you call the credit card company and tell them I've lost my card?" She closes her eyes and braces for impact. Threeâ€|twoâ€|oneâ€|

Mum sighs, a world of disappointment in one exhalation. "Your card and what else?"

"Just my wallet and some money. Not my passport."

"Well, thank goodness for that. Yes, I'll call right away."

Elinor DunBroch to the rescue. She'll get things sorted. "Thanks, Mum. And could you maybe call Mr. Haddock and ask him to transfer some money into Hiccup's account? I promise I'll pay him back from my next paycheck."

"Yes, dear. Other than that, are you having a good time?"

"I am."

"Good. I'm looking forward to hearing about it when you get home. Try not to lose anything else important in the meantime." She thinks Hiccup falls under that category, and is glad she'd called Jamie instead of her parents.

"I won't. I love you. Tell Dad I said the same."

"You, too. Love to Hiccup."

"Bye."

She ends the call feeling better; Hiccup's competence and her mum's predictable mild exasperation together have a calming effect. She joins him and kisses him on the cheek. "From my mum."

He studies her face for a moment: she's less tense now, the angry glint gone from her eyes. "Ready to keep going?"

"Ready."

* * *

><p>Despite their brush with crime they both fall in love with Prague. It's lively and elegant, even with its graceful Old Town

packed with tourists. The beer is cheap and good, and the variety of architectural styles almost overwhelms Hiccup, from the Gothic in the Old Town to the Art Nouveau scattered around Josefov to the modern Dancing Building.<p>

They end up joining an excursion to Pilsen to visit the brewery there, which Merida treats as a pilgrimage to some sacred site. She steals his camera and takes lots of pictures, and makes him photograph her in front of the big Pilsner Urquell sign. In the cool cellars they're served unpasteurized beer and Hiccup lets her finish his cupful.

"I deserve a raise when I get back with all this research I'm doing," she says, totally straight-faced, an empty cup in front of her and a half-full one in her hand.

"Your devotion to the noble art of bartending is truly touching." It's probably not a good idea to tell her about the still in Gobber's basement. He can picture it now, the two of them bonding over distilling dragonbreath, trying out new recipes and giggling together as they sample the results. This must never be allowed to happen, he thinks, even as he realizes with a sinking feeling that it's inevitable. The mad chemists will cackle away in the basement and he'll be the one taking them snacks, like somebody's mom at a slumber party, while his dad rolls his eyes good-naturedly and hollers for them to keep the noise down.

Since Prague is their last stop they do as much as they can: they visit the Museum of Communism and the synagogues of the Jewish Museum, both heavy with the burden of memory; they watch the astronomical clock toll at noon and drink absinthe at midnight; they stand in stained glass-colored light in the cathedral. At the top of the clock tower he kisses her hard, catching her unprepared and taking her breath away, and she shuts her eyes on the beautiful city to focus on him.

* * *

><p>Someone sitting near them forgot to put on deodorant this morning. To avoid having to smell it she buries her nose in Hiccup's shoulder, breathing in the familiar scent of him, thankful that they managed to snag seats next to each other. Boarding these no-reserved-seats flights is as close to anarchy as she ever wants to get. Hiccup's jotting something down in one of his notebooks, near a sketch of a vaulted ceiling, and for a moment she tries to work out where it's from; she can't, and she bets he couldn't, either, if he hadn't written it down. She's seen so many of them recently that they've all started to blur together a bit, though she's certain he has a favorite.<p>

"So which cathedral should we get married in?"

It's not until he twists his whole body to look at her that she realizes what she's said. They've never talked about it beforeâ€"her mum had used the m-word about him, them, and Merida had maybe thought about it once or twice, just as a possibility, but she hadn't ever brought it up to him and she kind of wishes she hasn't now, as a slow smile creeps across his face.

"Did you just propose to me?"

She's actually flustered. "I didn't mean right now. I just meantâ€" "

"I think I know what you meant." He looks smug, full of himself at the idea.

"Oh, do you?"

He shrugs. "Sure. What woman wouldn't want all this?" He gestures to himself and she snorts out a laugh. He ignores her. "You can't help it that you find me irresistible."

"You're right. I just want you all to myself." That's true, and he can probably see right through her deadpan tone. "This whole trip was just an excuse to look for a wedding venue."

"I thought you'd want to get married a little closer to home. Like Westminster Abbey."

She shakes her head hard enough to whip him in the face with her hair. "Never. We can get married anywhere in the world except for England."

"It's not like we don't have time to figure it out. We've gotta finish school, including my Master'sâ€" "

"And mine," she cuts in.

"â€"and then I have to get a job. I'm not going to be your trophy husband, no matter how handsome and charming I am." Her head drops against the headrest as she laughs, and he tries to look offended, drawing his eyebrows together and narrowing his eyes.

"Hiccup, love, no one will ever think you're just a pretty face."

"Handsome," he insists, "and I think I should feel insulted."

"You're so much more than that." He hmps, mollified, as she threads her fingers through his. "Though you are very attractive."

"Thank you."

Now that they've broached the subject it feels less scary (though still scary enough). At least now he knows for sure what he's getting intoâ€"they both do. It'd be an understatement to say that the trip has been a learning experience, even apart from the architecture. They've fought, and not for the last time, but now she knows what it feels like to be without him because of her thoughtlessness and her temper. She'll remember that feeling, use it to keep her anger in check. And he'll call her out when she's got her head up her arse, and forgive her for it afterward. It may not always be easy, but she knows they'll make it work.

He's right, they've got time. But sooner or later she's going to marry him.

Not everything is going to be different, though, and it's best he knows that now. "I'm not changing my name," she declares before adding, "I hope that's okay with you." Even if it's not okay with him, she won't change it.

"What, you don't want to be Merida Haddock?" He grins at the frozen expression of horrified incredulity as she tries to imagine the rest of her life with that name. He can't say he blames her; he's had a lifetime to get used to the name, but he understands where she's coming from. Her name is as much a part of who she is as her hair or the house or archery or the wind on the loch is. That doesn't mean he's not going to tease her about it, though. "You didn't spend all last year writing Mrs. Hiccup Haddock in the margins of your notes? Or maybe Merida DunBroch-hyphen-Haddock?"

When faced with the long-term consequences she seems to be rethinking the whole situation. He can't really blame her for that, either.

He squeezes her hand in reassurance. "You don't have to change your name. Especially since you might be the president by then."

Nodding in agreement and feeling really relieved, she muses, "As president I'm going to need a proper Scottish wedding with all the trimmings. That includes my husband wearing a kilt."

"What, you don't have to change your name but I have to wear a kilt? That's not fair."

"But you'd look lovely in one." She bats her eyelashes at him; he can tell she thinks she looks ridiculous when in reality she's dangerously alluring.

He stares into her eyes, bluer than the rivers they've seen, bluer than the skies above cathedral spires, sparkling with mirth and affection, and he can't wait until they're back in her flat in Edinburgh, where he can kiss her without worrying that they're going to end up in the background of some random person's vacation pictures. He's missed her tattoo and the feeling of her bare skin against his, the way she says things that drive him crazy and the way he can make her blush with just a few words. But just because he wants her, and kind of desperately at this point, doesn't mean he's going to let her trick him into anything.

So he steels himself and says, "Merida, I love you. I'd do pretty much anything for you. But I am not going to wear a skirt."

"Watch it, lad." She narrows her eyes and stabs a finger into his shoulder. "It's a kilt, not a skirt."

"Whatever it is, I'm not wearing one."

Five years later, he totally does.

* * *

><p>Notes:

How much gelato is too much? The world may never know.

>Switzerland has four official languages: German, French, Italian, and Romansh. Bilingualism, either fluent or functional, is generally

much more common in Europe than in the US.
Vous Ãªtes d'oÃ¹? =
Where are you (plural) from?
>Je suis Ã©cossaise..._et Hiccup est de l'Ã®le de Berk = _I'm
Scottish...and Hiccup is from the island of Berk.
>Un vrai Viking, _hein?_ = A true Viking, eh?

>Vraiment?...Vous Ãªtes sÃªr? = Really?...Are you sure?

>Oui, c'est pas de problem = Yes, it's no problem.
>You'll just have to Google the Dancing Building. It's hard to
describe.
Pilsen (PlzeÅ^ in Czech) is where the pilsner style of
beer originated.
>The five years is based on Flying Buttress Appreciation Society
member Molly Bergstrom's superior knowledge of architecture school.
In that time Hiccup should have his Master's and have been employed
for a year, if not more.<p>

End
file.